

Physical Character

The Physical Character Chapter is intended to guide public and private investments to create a more attractive community. Eau Claire should be attractive, as well as efficient and financially strong. The goal, objectives, and policies of this chapter direct the City in terms of its ordinances, capital budget expenditures, and public infrastructure design, especially in regard to streets and parks. Private actions are directed through the City's review of development applications and amendments to the City's Zoning Ordinance.

Urban design is both a professional discipline and an orientation or attitude towards the urban environment. As such, it touches almost every aspect of the physical form of a City, from land use, to housing, to transportation, parks and open space. Therefore, many aspects of the urban design recommendations refer to other chapters of the *Comprehensive Plan*, especially under the topics of Land Use and Parks. The primary focus of this chapter is on the characteristics, such as waterfronts, and established residential neighborhoods that make Eau Claire special.

The intent of the Physical Character Chapter is to create a community of distinctive neighborhoods that are supported by green public lands, and vital civic and commercial centers. The recommendations direct Eau Claire to take better advantage of its major natural attributes, such as the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers, Sherman, Lowes, and Otter Creeks, and the wooded hillsides. New neighborhoods should be designed with some of the valued characteristics of the City's traditional neighborhoods. Parks and greenways should be designed and connected to help build lasting neighborhood value. Downtown should become more urban, dense, walkable, and linked to the rivers.

Key Issues

1. **Street Connectivity:** What should the City do to ensure streets in new neighborhoods are interconnected and are not dominated by a cul-de-sac pattern?
2. **Sidewalks:** What should the City do to provide an integrated and connected pattern of sidewalks and pedestrian pathways for residential streets?
3. **Garages:** What design standards should the City establish for residential garages?
4. **Guidelines for Site Planning:** What changes in design standards and compliance enforcement should the City make for the *Multi-Family Housing Design Manual*, which was adopted in 1998?
5. **Context-Sensitive Architecture:** What should the City do to establish site design standards regarding the stylistic compatibility of new infill development and remodeling of existing single-family houses and multi-family structures with the predominant neighborhood aesthetic?

6. **Public Open Space:** What should the City do to create additional public open space in the older neighborhoods as redevelopment occurs?
7. **Mixture of Housing Types:** To what extent and under what conditions should the City encourage or require the integration of multiple-family housing into single-family neighborhoods?
8. **Mixed-use Development:** What standards or criteria should the City establish for the vertical or horizontal mixing of residential and non-residential land uses?
9. **Design Guidelines and Design Review:** What standards or requirements should the City establish for the design, landscaping, and lighting of commercial developments?
10. **Design Guidelines for Commercial Signs:** What standards should the City establish regarding the size, height, and number of commercial signs?
11. **Major Road Corridor Beautification:** What landscaping and decorative lighting improvement projects should the City seek along major City roadways, such as U.S. 124 (North Crossing), Hendrickson Drive, U.S. 12 (Clairemont Avenue) and Hastings Way?
12. **Public Access:** What should the City do to ensure sufficient public access along rivers, creeks, and stream edges?
13. **Land Use:** What should the City do to ensure the most appropriate pattern of land use along the rivers?
14. **Wooded Hillsides:** What should the City do to regulate tree cutting and grading of slopes?
15. **Barstow Avenue Streetscape:** What streetscape improvements should the City require for the reconstruction of Barstow Street?
16. **Town Square:** What should the City do to create a “town square” adjacent to City Hall and along Eau Claire Street?
17. **Medical Center Expansion:** What should the City do to regulate or restrict the expansion of medical-related and other commercial activities into existing residential neighborhoods?

Goal and Objectives

Goal: Improve the aesthetics and enhance the identity of the City as a whole, and its neighborhoods, major road corridors, and waterfronts by building on its traditional urban character, natural amenities, and history.

Objective 1 – Overall Urban Character: Design Eau Claire to incorporate the best aspects of both a small town and a major city.

Objective 2 – Regional Setting: Use public improvements, public art, and land development regulations to preserve, highlight, and interpret the major elements and special places that evoke the regional, environmental, and cultural history of Eau Claire.

Objective 3 – New Neighborhoods: Design new neighborhoods to reflect the best qualities of the traditional neighborhoods of Eau Claire.

Objective 4 – Established Neighborhoods: Maintain or revive the traditional urban character of the older neighborhoods so that they remain attractive places to live.

Objective 5 – Mixed- and Multi-use Development: Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more vital and walkable activity centers.

Objective 6 – Site Design: Improve standards for site planning and design, including building and parking placement, pedestrian connections, signage, and landscaping.

Objective 7 – Waterfronts: Improve the visual quality and connections to the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers to support appropriate development and enhance the community's quality of life.

Objective 8 – Major Road Corridors: Improve the appearance of the major roadway corridors in Eau Claire through landscaping, site planning, sign regulation, and access management.

Objective 9 – Parkways: Build an interconnected parkway system to help improve community appearances, property values, and quality of life.

Objective 10 – Parks: Build parks and interconnected greenways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire's cultural heritage, and honor civic life.

Objective 11 – Outdoor Lighting: Regulate outdoor lighting so as to reduce off-site glare and nuisances.

Physical Character Policies

Objective 1 – Overall Urban Character

Design Eau Claire to incorporate the best aspects of both a small town and a major city.

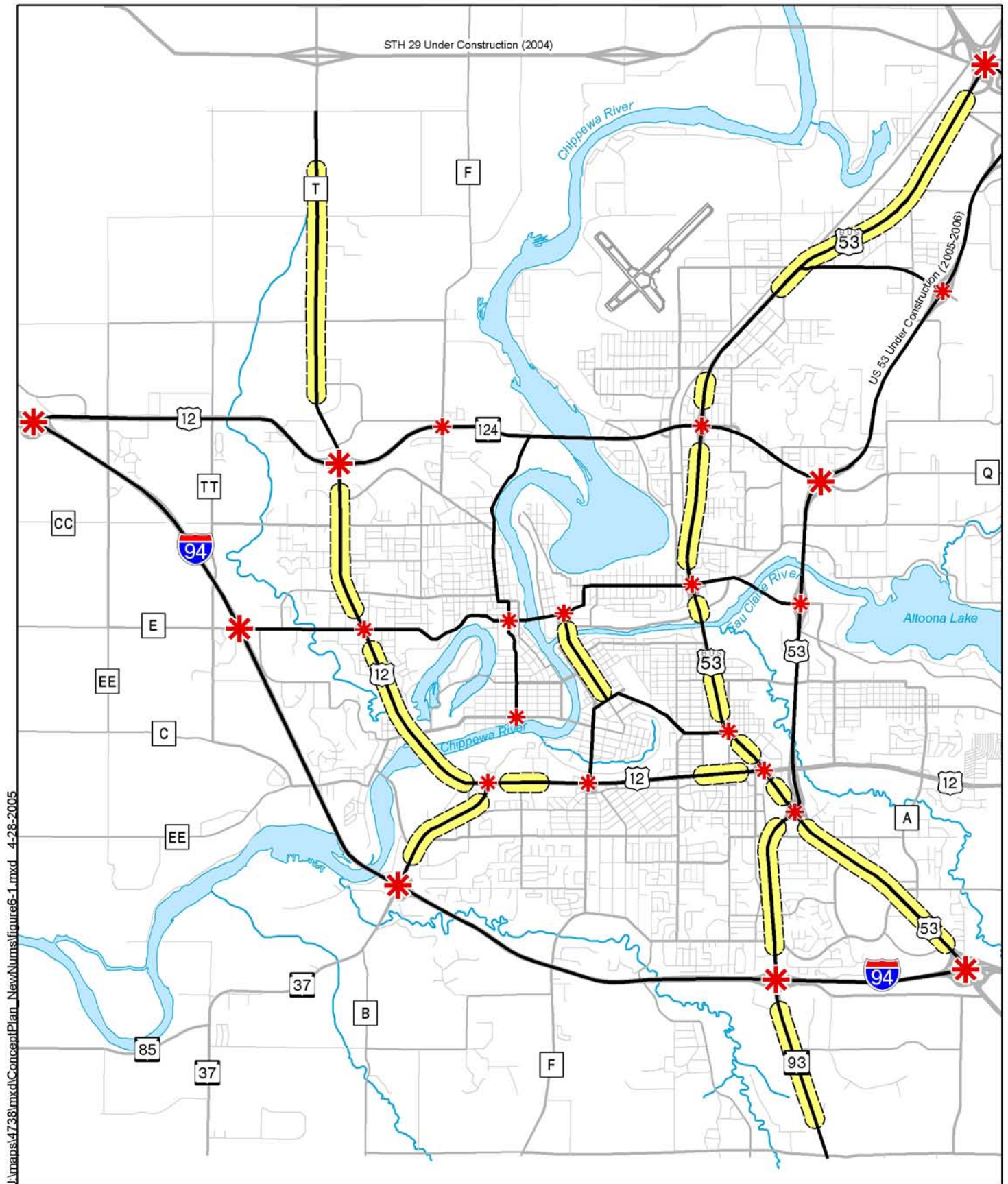
Eau Claire wishes to protect and extend the best aspects of its residential neighborhoods while intensifying the urban atmosphere of certain nodes such as the Downtown, the Water Street corridor, or the area around Oakwood Mall.

Policies:

- 1. Nodes of Urbanity in a Small Town:** Protect and improve the quiet, leafy and familial character of most residential neighborhoods, while accentuating the sense of urban diversity and intensity in certain other districts and corridors. The City should become more urban in some locations, and use that sense of urbanity as a marketing tool for long-term growth and stability for Eau Claire.
- 2. Downtown and the River:** Promote awareness of the Downtown and the rivers as an interesting and special aspect of the City.
- 3. Greening the City:** Create a network of interconnected greenways, parks, plazas, promenades, parkways, and other tree-lined streets to beautify the community, provide recreation, enhance quality of life, boost property values, and balance the effects of urban density.
- 4. Major Commercial Corridors:** Improve the appearance of the major commercial corridors within the City by requiring better private landscaping, installing better public landscaping, reducing the size and number of signs, limiting the number of additional billboards, locating some parking lots beside or behind buildings, and educating developers on the fine points of site planning and building design. Figure 6-1 identifies the major commercial corridors.
- 5. De-emphasize the Automobile:** Accommodate the automobile, but do not allow it to dictate all aspects of urban design. Give high priority to the pedestrian and pedestrian-oriented development.
- 6. Urban vs. Rural Distinctions:** Preserve and accentuate the difference between the urban landscape and the rural landscape by persuading neighboring rural towns to follow the guidance of the Land Use Chapter, which urges keeping housing density in the rural areas extremely low.

Objective 2 – Regional Setting

Use public improvements, public art, and land development regulations to preserve, highlight, and interpret the major elements and special places that evoke the regional environmental and cultural history of Eau Claire.



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- Legend**
- ✱ Major Entrances and Intersections
 - Major Travel Paths
 - ▬ Major Commercial Corridors

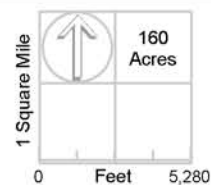


Figure 6-1

Major Road Corridors and Community Entrances

There are certain aspects of and locations in Eau Claire that make it distinctive, and accentuating those through public or private actions will help build a “sense of place.”

Policies:

1. **Paper Milling and Logging Economies:** Help residents and visitors understand the importance of the paper milling economy and the former logging economy, through signs, interpretive monuments, and views to the paper mill.
2. **Early Ethnic and Religious Heritage:** Interpret and highlight the early ethnic and religious heritage of Eau Claire with signs, interpretive monuments, use of historic place names, and the creation of appropriate parks or plazas, along with the policies of the *Historic Preservation Plan*.
3. **Special Places:** Protect, interpret, and enhance the qualities of the City’s “special places” that offer distinct and valued experiences. Some present opportunities for continued development, others for conservation. Examples of these “special places” include:
 - The waterfronts, especially the confluence and Phoenix Park
 - The lower Sherman Creek valley
 - Historic residential districts - Randall Park, Third Ward, and Emery Street
 - The West Grand Avenue business district
 - The historic central business district
 - The baseball stadium in Carson Park
 - Banbury Place, its manufacturing history, and its reincarnation as a multiple-use business and residential complex
 - Certain tree-lined residential streets
 - The logging history of Dell’s pond
 - The view from the top of Mount Tom
 - The views of the City from the surface of the Chippewa River
 - The trail hidden in the Putnam Park valley
4. **Entrance Corridors and Major Intersections:** Design major entries into the City and major intersections with attractive gateway features, including ground or monument signs, public art, and suitable landscaping and sign controls. The City should pursue opportunities for these enhancements within areas identified in Figure 6-1.
5. **Views and Landmarks:** Preserve and enhance important views and landmarks in order to maintain visual character and reinforce civic identity. Locations offering views of the waterfronts or of the City as a whole should be designed for public use, where feasible, with interpretive signs, on-street or off-street parking or pedestrian access, and suitable landscaping. The City should seek citizen input to help determine which views and landmarks are valued by the public and help guide strategies for preservation or enhancement.
6. **Wayfinding Sign System:** Develop a unified wayfinding sign system to advertise and make more visible Eau Claire’s major facilities and attractions to better assist pedestrians, bicycle, and motor vehicle circulation within the City.

Objective 3 – New Neighborhoods

Design new neighborhoods to reflect the best qualities of the traditional neighborhoods of Eau Claire.

The most desirable aspects of the City’s traditional neighborhoods should be carried forward and adapted to the design of new neighborhoods. These include relatively narrow lots (deeper than they are wide), and shorter front yard setbacks, continuous sidewalks, street trees and recessed garages (set back further than the principal facade). These are also the characteristics common to pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, in which compact development patterns and interconnected streets encourage socializing, walking, and bicycling.

Policies:

- 1. Minor Residential Streets:** Create a totally interconnected system with future minor or local residential streets and build them appropriately narrow. Provide public street access in each cardinal direction unless impractical because of natural, environmental, or similar conditions.

The street system is a fundamental element of the neighborhood design. The street pattern controls traffic flow, determines the ease of pedestrian and bicyclist movement, defines views and vistas, orients the user, unites the community, and creates a physical framework into which houses and other buildings are placed.

The function of minor residential streets should not be to move as much auto traffic as fast as possible, but rather to move autos at appropriately slow speeds to and from the home while also encouraging bicycling and walking, and creating an attractive forecourt for the housing.

Minor (local) streets should be built no wider than 32 feet (as measured from face-to-face of the curbing) so as to encourage slow traffic speeds that enhance the safety and enjoyment of other users. (Refer to Table 6-1 and Figures 6-2 and 6-3.)

The Eau Claire Subdivision Ordinance should be revised to clarify that 32 feet is the maximum dimension for minor residential streets, unless the Council grants an exemption in a special circumstance. In addition, the City will consider changing the traditional hierarchy of streets from arterial, collector, and minor to more closely match the street design guidelines recommended by the Center for Livable Communities or the Traditional Neighborhood Design Guidelines developed by the Institute of Transportation Engineers. That would allow for street design that is more context-based. (Refer to Objective 10, Neighborhood Streets, in the Transportation Chapter for further direction on the design of future local residential streets.)

Table 6-1
Recommended Design of New Residential Streets

Type of Street	Street Width*	Right-of-Way Width*	Traffic Direction	Parking	Planting Strip	Sidewalk	Utilities
Cul de Sac (< 8 houses)	26	60	Two ways	One side only	6 with trees	2 @ 5	Easement behind the sidewalk for electricity, telephone, cable TV. Sewer and water under the street.
Cul de Sac (8 or more houses)	28	60	Two ways	Both sides	6 with trees	2 @ 5	
Local	28	60	Two ways	One side only	6 with trees	2 @ 5	
Local	32	60	Two ways	Both sides	6 with trees	2 @ 5	
Collector (Minor)	32	66	Two ways	Both sides	8 with trees	2 @ 5	
Collector (Major)	36	66	Two ways	Both sides	8 with trees	2 @ 6	

*These are minimum distances, street width measured from face-to-face of curbing.

2. **Alleys:** Continue to allow alleys subject to the provision that they be privately maintained as they are presently.
3. **Collector Streets:** Plan collector streets for each future neighborhood with sub-area plans that link across neighborhoods to arterial roads and other collector roads. The City should continue to work with each land developer to plan the general alignment of streets beyond the limits of smaller subdivisions to ensure neighborhood-wide continuity.
4. **Sidewalks:** Continue to require that residential developers include a 5 foot concrete sidewalk on both sides of each new local and collector street.
5. **Street Trees:** Ensure trees are planted in the public right-of-way between the curb and the sidewalk along every street, including commercially oriented arterial roads and local residential streets. Trees regularly spaced along the street are a key ingredient for giving streets a residential character and making them feel more comfortable. Street trees add greenery, provide shade, give a street a lived-in feeling, and contribute to neighborhood character. Landscaping along the streets should be a joint public and private effort that could take advantage of both the public right-of-way and the private setback space.

Develop a GIS based street tree inventory for the City to better monitor type, location, age, and condition of the boulevard trees.

Figure 6-2
Recommended Local Residential Street Design with Parking on Both Sides

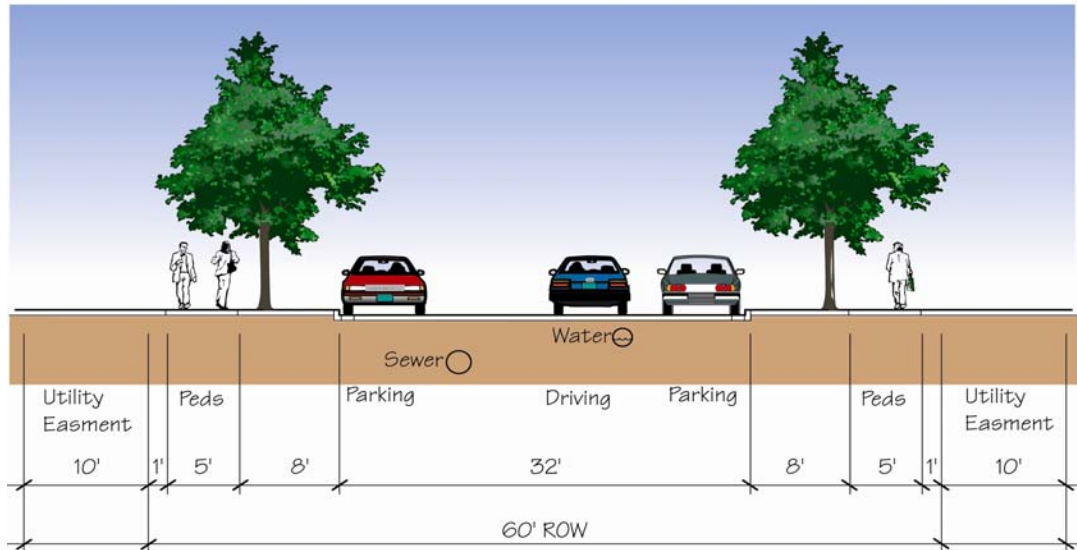
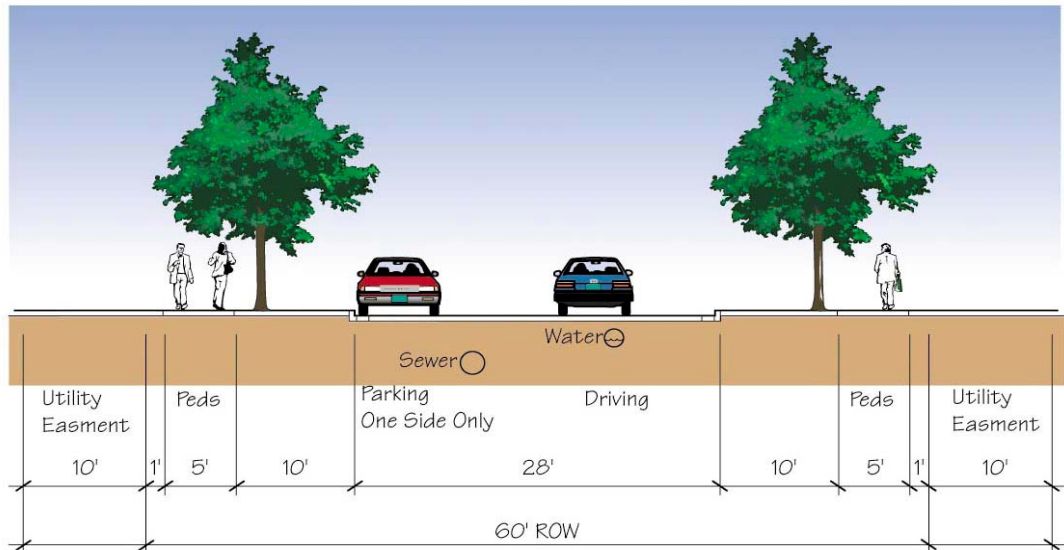


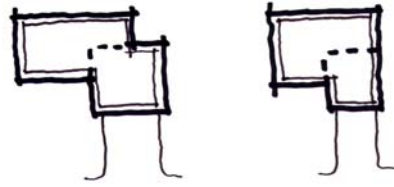
Figure 6-3
Recommended Local Residential Street Design with Parking on One Side Only



- 6. Garage Setbacks:** Allow garages to be set farther from the street than the front facade of the house, townhouse, or apartment building.

Because this change would reduce the efficiency of each parcel and increase costs, allow in the R-1 and R-2 zoning districts a front setback of 20 or 25 feet (instead of 30 feet) and a greater maximum lot coverage. Houses that do not meet this requirement should be held to the current 30-foot front yard and 30 percent maximum lot coverage. Regardless of which setback is used, all houses on the same block face must have the same front setback. Encourage local builders to adopt house floor plans that are more deep and narrow in response to this change.

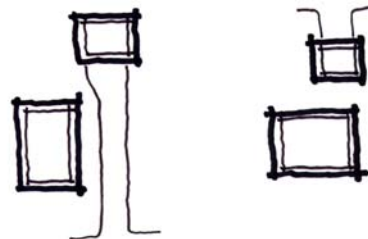
Standard garage relationship to house and street.



Typical setback positions for an attached garage: forward or turned.



Typical positions for detached garages, either accessed from the street (left) or an alley (right).



Objective 4 – Established Neighborhoods

Maintain or revive the traditional urban character of the older neighborhoods so that they remain attractive places to live.

The majority of urban development that will exist in Eau Claire by the year 2025 is already in place. These private and public improvements represent a tremendous investment and are essential to the quality of life and financial security of many thousands of people. In addition, the historic fabric of the community provides a sense of place and a physical environment that is nearly irreplaceable.

One of the strengths and beauties of older neighborhoods is the close-knit, compact mixture of different forms of housing, shops, offices, services, and employment areas. It is these urban patterns that will help make Eau Claire and its older neighborhoods distinct, livable, and competitive with other locations that are designed primarily for the automobile. New building technologies may be appropriate, but many elements of the traditional neighborhood will be respected and emulated.

Policies:

1. **Neighborhood Protection:** Continue to try to protect the best aspects of established areas from negative effects, such as excessive auto traffic or incompatible, unbuffered land uses. Simultaneously, blighted, deteriorating, or obsolete activities will be phased out and those sites improved according to an established plan. Guided by the planning and urban design principles of the *Comprehensive Plan*, private and public investments will aim to enhance or strengthen a sense of neighborhood identity in all established areas.
2. **Public-private Coordination:** Coordinate public sector actions and investments to promote private maintenance and renewal of established residential areas. Job growth will be promoted in mature areas to help reduce economic disparities. Blight and abandonment will not be regarded as unavoidable characteristics of older neighborhoods. Instead, the continual process of change will help keep those locations vital and desirable.
3. **Context-sensitive Redevelopment and Infill:** Encourage infill development in older traditional neighborhoods that respects the characteristics of those neighborhoods and is consistent with the prevalent housing styles in each neighborhood.

This principle does not imply that all housing will be of the same type (i.e., detached or duplex) but that older and newer housing will share many design elements. Redevelopment and infill are keys to strengthening older neighborhoods and will always be done in a manner that responds to and builds on the strengths of those neighborhoods.

Review zoning regulations that apply to the older neighborhoods so as to accommodate the nonconforming status of dwellings that were caused by setback or area requirements. Current zoning regulations sometimes create difficulties for property owners to properly maintain or upgrade houses.

4. **Mixed Use in Neighborhoods:** Identify locations for mixed use in established neighborhoods that already have some diversity of uses, proximity to transit, or major traffic corridors. The policies of the Physical Character Chapter regarding mixed use are applicable in the neighborhood context.
5. **Land Use Incompatibilities:** Seek to reduce or eliminate land use incompatibilities in older neighborhoods caused by industrial plants, materials or equipment storage, freight lines, or truck routes in close proximity to residential uses. There is often no easy way to resolve these incompatibilities in the short term. In general, improved code enforcement, buffering, and screening can reduce, if not eliminate, problems due to incompatibilities.

6. **Historic Preservation:** Preserve historic or architecturally significant buildings in established neighborhoods because they express the City's heritage and add beauty and charm to their surroundings. As specified in the Historic Preservation Chapter of this *Plan*, preservation does not necessarily involve historic designation, but can be achieved through tools such as neighborhood conservation districts.
7. **Planning and Design:** Prepare specific plans for a neighborhood or district in which a need for additional guidance beyond this *Comprehensive Plan* is identified. When preparing plans or implementing public improvements, the neighborhood policies in this chapter will be observed.

Objective 5 – Mixed- and Multi-use Development

Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in a variety of locations and scales in order to create more vital and walkable activity centers.

Zoning regulations can be used to promote private investment that is appropriate in size and composition for its location. In particular, some locations should be built with taller and more intensive structures, even mixing housing and shops vertically.

Policies:

1. **Neighborhood Center Scale:** Encourage compatible mixed uses at neighborhood “nodes” or centers in existing neighborhoods or districts, such as Water Street or Birch Street, that combine small-scale retail, services, offices, housing, and civic uses within single buildings or in separate buildings in close proximity.

Design standards and guidelines should be used to ensure compatibility between diverse land uses and create a pedestrian-oriented environment. These include:

- Placement of buildings and building entrances close to the sidewalk to enhance visibility and pedestrian access;
- Locating parking lots to the side and rear of buildings, not in front;
- Screening of parking lots from the street;
- A high degree of storefront transparency to provide both natural surveillance and visual interest;
- Building architecture that respects the neighborhood context, with building heights and massing that are compatible with adjacent residential areas;
- Pedestrian-scale lighting;
- Other streetscape elements such as street trees, benches, and kiosks that help create a distinct identity for the neighborhood center.

In neighborhood commercial nodes it is also important to limit the size of individual retail or office uses, to ensure that businesses are designed to serve their immediate surroundings, rather than a regional market.

2. **Commercial District Scale:** Encourage mixed uses that combine a variety of compatible housing types with existing commercial and office uses in the larger commercial districts such as Downtown, Hastings Way, Harding Avenue, and the vicinity of Oakwood Mall. The addition of upper-story residential units, nearby townhouses, and other types of attached housing can bring more people into these districts, enhancing their economic viability and urban vitality. The design principles listed above are equally applicable in these districts, although the size of individual business may be larger – a “medium” rather than “big-box” level of retail.

In the City’s newer commercial districts, most of them located along commercial corridors, mixed-use development may also be a viable strategy, but will generally require larger-scale development. Many Midwestern communities with commercial “strips” are exploring similar strategies for redevelopment, including the use of “liner” buildings oriented to the street along the edges of parking lots, reorienting buildings to new internal streets, and introducing higher-density housing in conjunction with public open space. As the size of these sites and their exposure to regional traffic increases, the size of individual businesses or buildings may also increase.

3. **Downtown Scale:** Seek to attract a complete mix of uses, including offices, retail and services, government, arts, entertainment, housing, parks, trails, and visitor attractions in the Downtown. To strengthen the Downtown’s position as the center of both the City and the region, it should increasingly be a place that people can live, work, shop, and enjoy cultural and recreational opportunities. The policies and recommendations of the *Downtown Action Plan 2001* generally encourage this evolution. The City should develop zoning regulations and design guidelines that ensure that each new building (including parking structures) enhances the public realm and the totality of the Downtown district.
4. **New Neighborhoods and Centers:** Seek to implement the principles for new neighborhood design as outlined in this *Plan*, which call for a pattern of compact mixed-use activity centers within walking distance of residential neighborhoods, linked by interconnected streets, and punctuated by parks and prominent civic buildings.

Objective 6 – Site Design

Improve standards for site planning and design, including building and parking placement, pedestrian connections, signage, and landscaping.

The details of private site design, including landscaping, lighting, and signs, are critical to the overall appearance of the City. Eau Claire has improved its zoning regulations in this regard but can do more.

Policies:

1. **Connections:** Maximize visual and physical linkages between adjoining land uses that are similar or can coexist compatibly, such as offices and retail or high-density

housing. Encourage pedestrian movement between adjacent sites rather than multiple trips by car. Where uses are less compatible (such as industrial and residential uses), provide adequate landscape buffers and screens to soften the transition between them.

2. **Efficiency:** Encourage sites to share functional site design elements, such as shared access, shared parking, coordinated landscaping, linked open space, and surface water detention areas, when such elements support a more efficient and attractive development pattern.
3. **Landscaping:** Continue to require high quality planting plans for all new multi-family residential, commercial, and industrial developments. Incorporate the guidelines of the Landscape Manual into the Zoning Ordinance to give them more force.
4. **Sensitivity to Context:** Design new development to respect surrounding development, whether this includes quiet low-density residential neighborhoods, traditional storefronts, or major institutions such as the hospitals. New development should emulate the desirable qualities of traditional urban settings, while protecting the integrity of existing neighborhoods.
5. **Parking Design:** Locate parking lots behind or to the side of buildings or in block interiors wherever possible in order to reduce the visual impact of surface parking. Landscape and screen all parking lots and parking structures in order to improve their appearance from surrounding streets and properties.
6. **Environmental Protection:** Continue to require protection of natural features, such as major wooded areas, steep wooded slopes, streams, wetlands, and stream edges in new developments. The City should consider adopting an ordinance that regulates development of steep slopes. (Refer to the Natural Resources Chapter.)
7. **Open Space:** Preserve open space in new developments through the use of planned unit developments, conservation easements, parkland acquisition or dedication, and other techniques.

The City should consider adopting an ordinance that would require land developers to give the City a certain percentage of the subdivision if the *Parks System Plan* shows the need for a park in that location, or money in place of land.

8. **Coordinated Signage:** Develop standards for coordination of multiple signs on a development site to ensure compatibility of size, colors, graphics, and materials.
9. **Transit-oriented Design:** Ensure that new developments along transportation corridors support existing or potential transit service by placing building entrances close to the street and making provisions for location of bus stops or shelters in convenient and visible locations.
10. **Incentives:** Encourage innovative development and redevelopment through the use of incentives and appropriate regulations, to achieve desired residential and nonresidential development patterns that are also environmentally responsible. Provide incentives for developments that protect natural areas or environmentally

sensitive areas through land trusts, open space zoning, or other techniques such as density bonuses for open space development.

Objective 7 – Waterfronts

Improve the visual quality and connections to the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers to support appropriate development and enhance the community's quality of life.

Waterfront open space, especially with walking and bicycling paths, always adds to quality of life and economic development in any community. Eau Claire is blessed with not one but two fine rivers, and they join in the middle of the community. The City has taken advantages of opportunities that have arisen over the years to acquire riverfront land for parks, trails, and flood plain open space.

The most recent example of riverfront land acquisition is Phoenix Park, located at the rivers' confluence and an essential component of the North Barstow District redevelopment project. Other riverfront open spaces include: Owen Park, Riverview Park, the NW Community Park, Mount Simon Park, the University arboretum and the recently acquired Forest Street flood plain. There are additional opportunities to add public open space in key locations, such as Downtown.

Riverfront views also raise the value of nearby development and can be a powerful catalyst for investment. In some locations, the waterfronts are devoted to parking lots or to industries that do not use the water for either shipping or power and that are unsightly. Thus, there are opportunities to redevelop land to take advantage of views to the river. The three creeks, Sherman, Lowes, and Otter, present similar but less dramatic opportunities for parks and paths, and have flood plains that should be protected in any case.

- 1. Downtown Design Plan:** Continue to follow the precepts of the *Downtown Action Plan 2001*, especially as they address the Chippewa and Eau Claire riverfronts.
- 2. Public Open Space and Walkways:** Continue to acquire land to extend its system of linear public open space with walkways along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, except where industry or other development makes it impractical and unsafe. If property cannot be acquired outright, the City will attempt to negotiate public access easements across the private site along the riverfront where plans show a desire for an extended public walkway.
- 3. Relationships of Buildings to the Open Space Edge:** Ensure that private buildings along the riverfront linear parks provide windows, doors, landscaping, high quality materials, and possibly outdoor private spaces, such as dining, to complement the public space. In addition, update the City's Greenway Guidelines to ensure high quality development and provide open space to and along the waterways. (See the Natural Resources Chapter.)

4. **Edge Treatments:** Use alternatives to rip-rap or sheetpile shoreline stabilization, including plantings with fast-growing streambank vegetation in more protected locations. (See the Natural Resources Chapter.)

Objective 8 – Major Road Corridors

Improve the appearance of the major road corridors in Eau Claire through landscaping, site planning, sign regulation, and access management.

This section of the Physical Character Chapter addresses both commercial and residential corridors. Each type of corridor carries large volumes of traffic, but each is in a different setting and, therefore, must respond to different conditions.

Major roadways such as Clairemont, Hastings Way, or Highway 93, which serve many businesses, present the greatest challenge in terms of community image. They are intensely developed and also contain some of the least attractive visual environments in the City. Major issues are the constrained rights-of-way conditions, large expanses of pavement, overhead utility lines, proliferation of public and private signs and billboards, and lack of landscaping.

Major roads that abut housing, such as portions of State, Birch, or Main Streets are different from the open roadway corridors in that they are much more densely developed and have a more urban appearance.

Continuous landscaping treatments in the residential road corridors would provide a prime opportunity to enhance and green the City. Since there is no need to maintain views of businesses, as there is in commercial corridors, extensive use of shrubbery and/or closely spaced canopy street trees could be used to enhance these corridors. (See also the Transportation Chapter, Policy 3, Mode Connectivity, and Objective 7, Pedestrian Environment, for additional policies regarding pedestrian connections.)

Policies:

1. **Commercial Site Landscaping:** Continue to require landscaping plans with commercial site plans and incorporate the current City landscaping guidelines into the Zoning Ordinance. One of the more noticeable negative features in the commercial corridors is the lack of screening for many large parking lots, which results in a continuous, uninterrupted expanse of pavement between building lines on opposite sides of the road.

A row of deciduous trees along the roadside, spaced at 30 feet, would dramatically soften the appearance of the corridor, especially when viewed from an angle down the road.

A low landscaped screen, up to three feet tall, along the right-of-way line, or at the edge of parking lots would dramatically improve the visual character of the corridors by adding greenery to the streetscapes and by breaking up the large expanses of pavement.

Additional parking lot landscaping would also help to break up large expanses of pavement and identify pedestrian walkway areas.

2. Corridor Landscaping and Lighting Improvements:

Apply special landscaping and lighting treatments to portions of selected major commercial roadway corridors to enhance their identity and to provide visual variety. These designs could be installed through the proposed parkway program (see Objective 9, Parkways, below) and consist of unique landscaping treatments, distinct light fixtures, or custom banners or signs.



Hastings Way

Hastings Way would be the prime candidate for this treatment, after jurisdiction for that road is transferred from WisDOT to the City. The first priority along this lengthy corridor would be the segment from Birch Street south to the interchange with the new Highway 53.



Clairemont Avenue

Unfortunately, in some locations along Hastings Way there is no private landscaping at all, and the highway has been widened so greatly there is very little space between the road and the parking lots. This should not dissuade the City from making the investment; in fact it should heighten the importance, but it will require more skilled landscape architecture.

Other choices would be Clairemont Avenue, especially in conjunction with improvements near the University-Hospital complex, and Hendrickson Drive, which is a major entrance to the community.

The City should prepare a special theme treatment design for each corridor, along with an implementation program.

- 3. Commercial Lighting:** Seek to amend City ordinances to require a lighting plan as part of each site plan. The regulations will require that lighting elements not be visible from the public road and that light cut-off features be used to control glare. Excessive lighting detracts from the appearance of a community, interferes



with driving, and blocks views of the night sky. Particularly onerous are the overlit canopies at gasoline service stations and convenience food stores, which shine light directly onto the road instead of focusing it downward.

4. **Access Points:** Apply the access management guidelines presented in the Transportation Chapter during site plan review to limit the number of access points, regulate their spacing, and consolidate existing points. Multiple access points in the commercial corridors create a sense of clutter, require more pavement, and reduce the opportunities for landscaping. Although it may not always be feasible to totally remove some of the access points, there may be opportunities to reduce or combine multiple access points to a single property or to adjoining properties.
5. **Business Signs:** Propose amendments to the City sign regulations for commercial corridors that would simplify, coordinate, and limit the number of signs. Guidelines need to be developed for limiting the messages on each sign, establishing standards for electronic message center signs, restricting the number and size of signs permitted, and combining multiple signs into fewer coordinated sign panels. Excessive signage results in visual overload and clutter that reduces their effectiveness and contributes to the visual pollution of the corridors.
6. **Billboards:** Revise City ordinances to increase spacing requirements for billboards, along arterial and collector streets. In particular, additional billboards should not be permitted along major intersections and major commercial corridors identified in Figure 6-1. Off-premise advertising (commonly known as billboard signs) can be a major community image issue. While some billboards can be reasonably attractive, they essentially represent visual pollution and can have a severe negative impact on a community's visual environment.
7. **Relocate Utility Lines:** Consider paying to relocate utility lines underground or to less visible corridors in special instances, such as when engaging in streetscape improvements, road widening and/or area revitalization projects. Overhead utility lines are one of the major visual impacts in some of the arterial road corridors, such as Hastings Way and West Clairemont Avenue. Tall, wooden poles and the large number and complex pattern of lines create a congested and unsightly visual environment, and result in heavy, unsightly pruning of street trees. The poles occupy valuable space in already-constricted rights-of-way, and in some cases are dangerously close to the traffic lanes.

Ideally, all overhead utility lines should be relocated underground, or, if that is not feasible, relocated to a less visible corridor. However, some overhead utilities, such as high-voltage lines, may be too expensive or impractical to locate underground. In that case, solutions should be explored to minimize the visual impact of the lines by designing special, less obtrusive utility poles and by combining as many of the lines in as few locations as possible.

Utility boxes can also be obtrusive, unattractive elements in new neighborhoods. The City will encourage their location in less visible locations.

8. **Housing Abutting High-volume Roads:** Require landscaping in situations where housing abuts high volume roads (either facing or backing up to the road), to mitigate the effect of the traffic on the housing. Such screening should consist of earth berms or of screen walls. Landscaping treatments should be used for the berms and the screen walls, and the screen walls should be designed to complement the adjoining residential developments.
9. **Public Improvements:** Include extra landscaping and berming along residential neighborhoods when installing public landscaping along major roads or when building new arterial roads.
10. **Street Trees:** Continue to require that new residential developments include trees in the boulevard along all streets, following the species plan adopted by the City.

Objective 9 – Parkways

Build an interconnected parkway system to help improve community appearances, property values, and quality of life.

Eau Claire has an opportunity to begin to create a City-wide network of highly attractive streets that will bring value and enjoyment to the community for centuries. Because the street system is the spine of the City and the most visible of public expenditures, the parkway system proposed here could have a major visual and economic effect. There is much potential for improvement in the appearance of Eau Claire's arterial and collector street system because that aspect of the major streets has been neglected in the past.

The purposes and benefits of the parkway system are to:

- Improve the overall appearance, identity, and quality of life of the community;
- Increase and sustain property values;
- Create bicyclist and pedestrian links among the neighborhoods, districts, greenways, and parks;
- Create visual community entry statements;
- Provide a ceremonial approach to important locations such as Downtown;
- Calm traffic speeds in residential neighborhoods.

Policies:

1. **Parkways System Plan:** Engage in a long-term program to create a system of parkways or heavily landscaped streets, as illustrated by Figure 6-4 and the cross-section sketches shown in Figures 6-5 and 6-6.

Roads proposed to receive these parkway treatments are:

- Hastings Way (between U.S. 124 and Golf Road)
- Clairemont Avenue (from Hastings Way to U.S. 124)
- State and Washington Streets (between Farwell Street and Clairemont Avenue)
- Farwell Street (between Birch Street and Washington Street)
- Birch and Cameron Streets (between Clairemont Avenue and Hastings Way)



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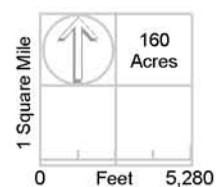


Figure 6-4

Proposed Parkway System

Figure 6-5
Residential Minor Arterial Parkway

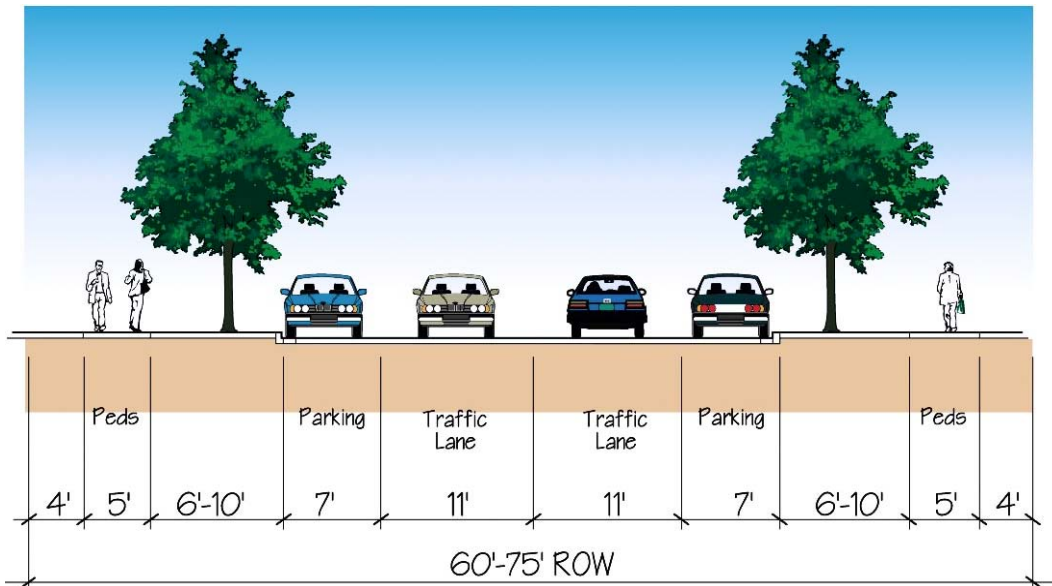
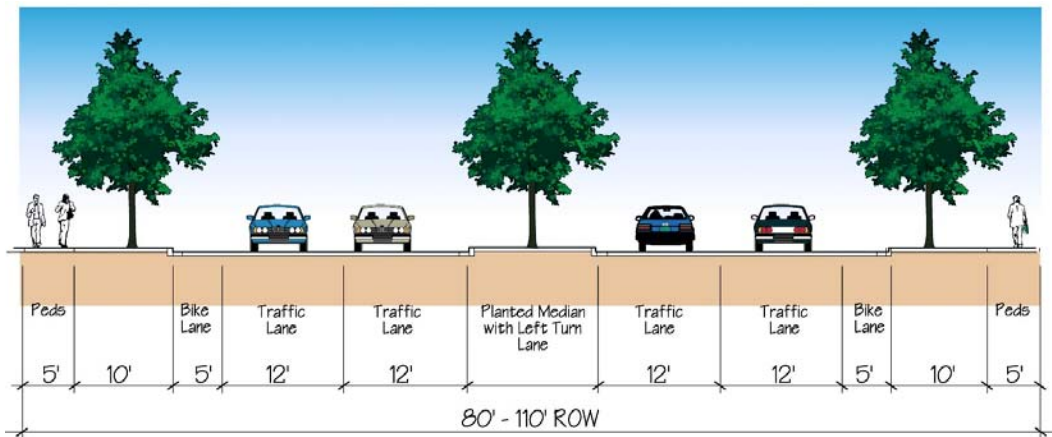


Figure 6-6
Major Arterial Parkway – 5 Lanes with Median and Bicycle Lanes (optional) (e.g., Clairemont Avenue)



- Cameron Street (between Clairemont Avenue and County Highway EE)
- Fifth Avenue (from Cameron Street to Lake Street)
- Lake Street (from Carson Park to Downtown)
- Carson Park Drive
- Harding Avenue

Thus, the parkway system would form a ring around the central part of the City, link to and through Downtown, provide community entrances, and extend into one perimeter growth area.

Parkways are intended to be arterial or collector roads that include a high degree of landscaping, decorative lighting, and, depending on the situation, sidewalks, on-road lanes, or off-road paths for bicycling. Adjacent private landscaping should generally be improved (as recommended elsewhere in this *Plan*) and coordinated with the public landscaping.

Parkways would vary in their design across the City, since some would be built in newly-developing areas where adequate rights-of-way can be obtained, while others will be constructed in more constrained locations. Traffic capacity and posted speeds may also vary according to the function of each parkway in the road network.

In general, however, the parkway system should be designed to the highest quality in landscaping, signage, lighting, linear public open space, and pedestrian or bicyclist transportation. The parkways will connect parks, greenways, and major civic districts (such as Downtown) to the greatest extent possible.

The relationship between each parkway and nearby existing or future land development will always be a primary consideration.



This portion of State Street exhibits typical parkway features.



Larpenteur Parkway in St. Paul

Objective 10 – Parks

Build parks and interconnected greenways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire’s cultural heritage, and honor civic life.

It is appropriate to address parks as an element of urban design in Eau Claire. Parks are a source of beauty, as well as outdoor recreation. They soften the feel of urban development, add greenery to neighborhoods, and protect some environmental features. Properly planned and designed, parks can and should be the visual focus of a neighborhood or commercial district while greenways can connect parts of the City. Like streets and parkways, parks and greenways are major determinants of the appearance of a community and can contribute mightily to its quality of life, while also enhancing property values. Parks should be viewed as one element of a larger system of civic spaces that are interconnected and complementary. (See the Parks System Chapter.)

Policies:

- 1. A Network of Green Spaces:** Continue to build a system of green open spaces for recreation, urban beauty, and natural protection that are linked by linear parks (greenways), off-road paths and on-street bicycle lanes, and generously landscaped roads known as parkways.
- 2. A System of Civic Spaces:** Treat the park and greenway system as one element of a larger system of civic spaces. Through a high quality of design and stewardship, these civic features will sustain the quality of life, private investment, and economic competitiveness of Eau Claire. The system elements should be designed to complement one another visually and functionally and should be interconnected for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. Other elements of this system include:
 - Parks of all types
 - Plazas
 - Public schools
 - Civic buildings, such as City Hall
 - Local residential streets, sidewalks, and street trees
 - Minor arterial or collector roads
 - Bridges
 - Off-street and on-street bicycle lanes
 - Wetlands and ponds
 - Rivers and streams
 - Wooded areas
 - Major commercial areas
 - UW-EC/CVTC campuses
- 3. Neighborhood Quality:** Use parks, greenways, and parkways to improve the level of private investment in nearby housing and create lasting value in neighborhoods, as well as providing amenities for residents. These public spaces should be regarded as visual assets and designed as such. Each park should:
 - Be open to the neighborhood on at least half of its perimeter;
 - Include generous landscaping to soften and direct views;

- Have perimeter and internal walkways;
 - Have a defined entry and internal circulation paths;
 - Provide both active spaces and quiet, natural areas;
 - Use civic buildings such as a gazebo or picnic shelter as focal points;
 - In a school-park situation, be designed in coordination with the facilities provided by the school;
 - Include off-street parking designed in careful relation to the topography, plantings, and views so as to minimize its visual effect; no more off-street parking should be provided than is reasonable in addition to on-street parking;
 - Preserve historic character and reason why the park was established.
4. **Waterfront Public Open Space:** Acquire stream edges for public open space and parks, provide walkways and bicycling paths within that green space, protect key environmental features such as wetlands or flood plains, use environmentally-sensitive bank stabilization techniques instead of heavily engineered devices, and create visual and functional linkages between the waterfronts and nearby neighborhoods or districts.
- In addition, a large portion of the edge of public linear open space should abut local streets, rather than private lots, in order to extend the benefits of that open space into the larger neighborhood and community.
5. **Quiet Spaces:** Include quiet spaces in parks for strolling or sitting wherever the landscape allows. Some locations in the park system should be managed to retain their wooded or otherwise natural characteristics to invite exploration and discovery. Such places offer a small refuge from the bustle of the urban environment and offer opportunities to connect with nature on a daily basis.
6. **Civic Pride and Local Heritage:** Design and maintain parks and other public spaces as the highest expression of civic pride and local heritage. Parks should be beautiful as well as functional so that current generations will enjoy their use and future generations will appreciate what they represent. Parks and greenways should be inspiring and represent the best of Eau Claire.
7. **Park Buildings:** Adopt an architectural theme for City park buildings and related facilities after reflecting on local materials, building practices, cultural heritage, and user needs. Buildings should be classic in proportions and materials, adaptable, and long lasting. If necessary, it is preferable to delay construction than to install a structure that is not of sufficient quality.
8. **Associated Furnishings:** Use care in selecting associated park furnishings, such as benches, fences, signs, or trash containers. They should complement the design of the major buildings and require relatively low levels of maintenance.

Objective 11 – Outdoor Lighting

Regulate outdoor lighting so as to reduce off-site glare and nuisances.

Outdoor lighting is potentially one of the most attractive or disturbing elements of urban design. While it is a necessity in many locations, outdoor illumination is often overdone or poorly controlled, resulting in off-site glare.

Policies:

1. **General:** Control exterior lighting so it is not a nuisance to nearby property, is not a traffic hazard, and preserves the dark night sky.
2. **Regulation:** Draft and publicly review an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance that formalizes City regulation of outdoor lighting of all new development and consider an amendment to the electrical code pertaining to retrofitting existing outdoor lighting.
3. **Parking Lots:** Shield lighting in parking lots to contain glare on the site. Near residential areas, cut-off fixtures will be used and pole heights will be reduced.
4. **Building Lighting:** Control building lighting to keep glare on site and not allow buildings to be lit up for excessive display (e.g., lighting the entire facade).
5. **Gasoline Station Canopies:** Require lights under canopies to be recessed into the ceiling or otherwise designed so that the light source is not visible from the side and all light is directed downward.
6. **Light Type:** Encourage metal halide lighting rather than sodium vapor lighting.
7. **Street Lighting:** Initiate a long-term program of replacing streetlights with cut-off fixtures.